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ABSTRACT

Eastern Michigan University's program in language and international trade has three features that distinguish it from other attempts to address the role of world business or language education: (1) the spirit of cooperation evident in the interdisciplinary or joint degree, (2) the equal importance given to foreign language and business education, and (3) the unique coursework opportunities that the cooperation between disciplines allows. The joining of language and applied business is needed in international trade, given the relative decline of the U. S. position in an increasingly integrated global economy. The program combines language and cultural expertise with the necessary business background for handling the challenges of international trade. Courses that, although related, might not be as fully integrated are offered, such as multilingual team-taught business seminars. It is hoped that this program will educate students to develop international business expertise that will be communicated with language proficiency. (MSE)

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THE VALUE OF AN INTERDISCIPLINARY B.B.A.-B.A. PROGRAM IN
LANGUAGE AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

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The Value of an Interdisciplinary B.B.A.-B.A. Program in
Language and International Business

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While the details of Eastern Michigan University's United States Department of Education grant to develop a program in language and international business are summarized elsewhere in the proceedings of this conference, the uniqueness and intrinsic value of such a program perhaps need a bit further elaboration. The three features of Eastern Michigan University's program that most distinguish it from other attempts to address the role of world business or language education are 1) the spirit of cooperation evident in the joint B.B.A.-B.A. degree; 2) the equal importance of foreign language and business education to the joint degree; and 3) the unique coursework opportunities that the marriage of these two disciplines allows.

The spirit of cooperation evident in the concept of a joint B.B.A.-B.A. degree in language and international business remains arguably the most unique feature of the new program. To our knowledge, as the grant itself notes, "no other such undergraduate applied joint degree program exists in this country." Not only is such a prospect challenging from the standpoint of academe alone, but from the actual application

described in the grant expressly includes "an academic and work placement network in applied business and languages which is unparalleled."

The need for a joint degree joining language and international business expertise is most dramatically shown in the national trade deficit figures which currently far exceed the \$30 billion mark at one time thought to be impossible. Admittedly, one cannot reduce the cause of the current U.S. trade imbalance to one reason alone. Still, the failings of existing international business practices that the joint degree addresses have received considerable attention as a major factor in the relative decline of the United States in the increasingly integrated global economy. The President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies, for example, clearly focuses on this need for sensitivity to human and intercultural values in business:

International trade has become more important to our economic well-being than ever before, but our trade performance has deteriorated ominously: America's trade deficit amounted to \$28.5 billion in 1978.... While some [obstacles to greater U.S. participation in international trade] involve such factors as low rates of productivity growth and domestic inflation, it is the Commission's view that one serious barrier to American business is its lack of foreign language and area expertise.

(A Report to the President from the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979, pp. 125-26).

Because of the spirit of cooperation between the two

schools in offering a joint B.B.A.-B.A. degree, the Eastern Michigan University program is able to provide the needed language and area expertise coupled with the necessary background in business that would allow its graduates to handle the challenges of international trade. Language expertise is a vital component of such a program. At the heart of the new program is the central belief that the language of business is the language and culture of its customer. By integrating multilinguistic and intercultural values into the undergraduate studies and goals of the joint degree, the designers of the program hope to instill in its students an understanding not of foreign business practices and markets but rather the way in which business is conducted in other countries' domestic markets.

A joint degree combining language and international business, finally, offers a variety of courses which though related might not otherwise be as fully integrated. The degree requirements combine a defined track of language proficiency requirements suited to the rigors of academic exchange and work-intern demands with a menu of required and elective courses in finance, comparative management, marketing, accounting and production management.

Additionally, the program will offer a pilot set of multilingual team-taught business seminars. In this unique and exciting course opportunity, a team of instructors would gather seniors proficient in one or more languages and, as the grant states, "exercise them in problem-solving, communication, and

business applications" in the second or third language. Such a team-taught seminar embraces all three principle features of the new program. As a team-taught offering, the seminar clearly demonstrates the spirit of cooperation implicit in the joint degree program. As a course teaching advanced business concepts directly using the appropriate vocabulary from the second language taught in that language, the seminar produces an atmosphere conducive to the formation of a bilingual or multilingual liaison focused in communications coordination, skilled in strategizing, acute in assessing work demands, and capable of implementing these practices in an international environment. Finally, as a new course offering resulting solely from the possibilities of a joint degree, the team-taught multilingual seminar offers the student a unique opportunity currently offered in no other undergraduate business or language program in the United States.

It is the sincere belief of the drafters of this new joint degree program that such efforts will educate students to, in the words of the grant, "develop international business expertise, communicated with proficiency in language." Through such a program, it is hoped to help reverse the increasingly diminished role of the United States as a force in the worldwide integrated market.